

Testimony of Joseph Shortt
Appropriations Sub-Committee Public Hearing February 16, 2017
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Restore Funding to CTs Independent Living Centers

I've been fortunate enough to be an Independent Living advocate for the past six years, at one of the five Centers for Independent Living. As the result of a spinal cord injury in 2002 I'm a quadriplegic. After my accident, I relied heavily on Centers for Independent Living for assistance to overcome everyday challenges, for guidance from individuals with similar disabilities, and to become more independent. As an Independent living Advocate, I've been able to pass on the knowledge that I have acquired to individuals who are in the same position I was once in. Individuals who don't know where to turn for assistance, who need peer counseling, independent living skills, and in many cases an advocate. I understand there are hard decisions to make considering the fiscal crisis the state's in, but the services offered by Centers for Independent Living are Crucial for the well being of individuals living with a disability.

Centers for Independent Living offer essential services to children, adults, and elders with disabilities. They are the first place to go for accurate, unbiased information on all aspects of life related to living with a disability. In 2016, Independent Living Centers provided:

- Over 17,000 contacts for disability related information & referral services; and
- Assisted over 2500 individuals with independent living skills training, peer counseling, advocacy, youth & educational services, among other vital services such as housing, employment, transition, and transportation.
- Helped 588 individuals with disabilities get and keep affordable, accessible housing.

There are numerous additional services and programs that Centers for Independent Living offer beyond their five core services, such as the Money Follows the Person program. In 2016 Independent Living Centers transitioned 233 individuals out of costly nursing facilities and back into the community through Money Follows the person, SAVING the State over \$10 Million dollars; which is nearly 20 times the annual state funding for Centers for Independent Living.

Please restore full funding for the Centers for Independent Living.

Funding for Independent Living Centers has been continually reduced and there has already been a severe reduction of vital independent living services across the state because state funding has been cut to \$40,000 during the current fiscal year. That's why I'm not only requesting that you don't eliminate funding, but that you restore full funding for Independent Living Centers to the original \$528,680. So Independent Living Centers can continue helping individuals with disabilities live independently in the community, where they earn and spend money, pay taxes, and avoid costly institutional placements and other state services.

Thank you for your valuable time.

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